(HOWL #004)
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A World Not Built For Us: Navigating The Hearing World As A Deaf Little Critter

A little howl into the void
by Shimi

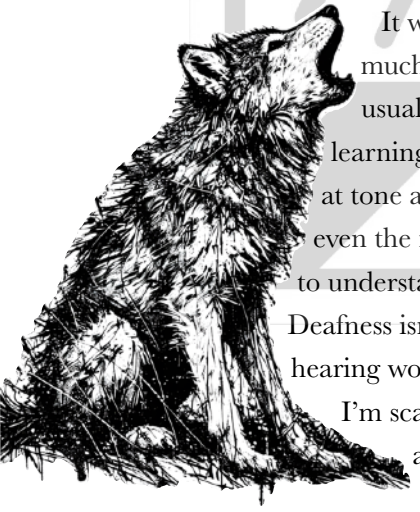
Little Howls Into the Void: A call to those of us who cannot hear the world like the rest.

These little howls into the void are usually more general and less personal. I try to address issues of community-building and kindness, to offer reflections that might serve others as well as myself. But this time, I'd like to briefly take a short break from all that and speak to something very close to my heart: deafness. Buckle in, I have a lot to say!

Lately, I've been talking with my partners about how much I've been struggling with being profoundly deaf and highly adapted in a world shaped by, and ruled by sound.

So much of how I communicate requires and depends on a kind of hyper-vigilance: watching lips, body posture, the micro-movements in creatures' faces, the way eyes dart or settle, the rhythm and cadence of the few mumbled sounds I still perceive. I don't need *all* of those things, but I do need *some* of them—just enough to thread together a sense of what's going on.

The other night, I had none.



It was too dark. There were too many people. Too much noise drowning out even the faint signals I usually cling to. I've spent most of my life adapting—learning to read lips, to interpret vibrations, and to guess at tone and context. But I knew I was in trouble when even the music on the TV began overpowering my ability to understand friends and my partner huddled around pizza.

Deafness isn't just something that sets me apart from the hearing world; it's something that separates me from it. And I'm scared—scared it will keep separating me again and again, in the same slow, familiar ways.

Living Honestly: The self-delusion of hyper-adaptation

Since moving to Seattle, since choosing to leave the UK and the dangers it held for me, I've been trying to live more honestly and more gently with myself. But part of that honesty means acknowledging that there are spaces where I simply cannot function. Spaces where my capacity to participate is stripped from me before I've even stepped through the door. And that hurts.

Because the places I frequent, *the* spaces we all gather—bars, clubs, underground raves, noisy gatherings—matter to me. They are places where creatures like me, like us, go to seek and be found. But I am not wholly there, I cannot participate. Not fully. Sometimes, not at all.

Approaching Silence:

I'm also reaching a point in my deafness where I don't think hearing aids are going to help anymore. They fail in the exact spaces where I need them most, amplifying the wrong sounds—background chaos instead of conversation. TVs at home, in sushi bars, music in crowded rooms, laughter behind me—they all blur into a wall of sound I can't parse. Instead of helping me join in, they leave me more confused, more exhausted, and more struggling. Hearing aids physically hurt my ears, and they emotionally hurt my heart—a constant reminder that they were never made for a critter like me. Someone who doesn't just need sound made louder, but made legible.

Deaf culture has taught me that hearing aids aren't always the answer. They are a tool, yes, but also a demand—an expectation from the hearing world that we meet it halfway, rather than being accepted as we are. I was taught that wearing them would help me "pass," help me fit in. But I'm starting to wonder if all they've done is teach me how to suffer more

quietly. And if they no longer help me, if they make things harder, then maybe I don't need them at all. Maybe I never did.

And I have to admit: I can't keep up. I do try. But each time I go out, it gets worse. I sit quietly, nursing drinks I can't afford, pretending to follow conversations, guessing at words, emotions, and meanings. And when I get it wrong—when I don't laugh at the right moment or respond unexpectedly—people look at me strangely, and I realise I've misread something. Again. I've made myself small again, bent myself to fit again—and this time failed.

That's not living honestly. That's survival, but it's also self-erasure. Pretending I can hear. Pretending I can keep up. Pretending I belong in spaces that were never designed with people like me in mind.

I taught myself how to lip-read, how to track group dynamics with my eyes, and how to mimic presence and understanding. I thought it was a skillset. But it is a mask. And I'm done wearing it.

Auditory struggles are not only for the deaf.

This howl is for you—if you too are profoundly deaf, or hard of hearing, or have auditory processing struggles—whether from disability, neurodivergence, or how your brain is mapped; all of us—this howl is for those of us struggling.

I live many of your struggles. And the frustration of not being understood by the auditory world pushed me to write this zine. It's for you. It's for me. It's for us. It's for everyone who loves someone who's deaf or wants to understand what our reality feels like *from the inside.*

To my deaf readers: I hope this serves as a reminder that you are not alone. That you belong to something vast, luminous, and full of love. That even in the most difficult corners of this noisy, indifferent world, there are others—arms outstretched, hearts open—waiting to welcome you. And if you are not yet there, know this: we are here. We are waiting. And you will be welcomed…

…and now, onto the zine.

Shimi

Life as a Deaf Little Critter in a Loud And Noisy Hearing World

For those of us who are deaf, navigating a world designed for hearing people is an ongoing challenge. It's not just about sound—it's about expectation, adaptation, and the constant pressure to fit into spaces that do not accommodate us.

The world is not built for us. For those of us who are deaf, hard of hearing, or who experience the world through senses other than sound, daily life is an exercise in adaptation. The hearing world does not make space for us naturally; we must carve it out ourselves. Every interaction, every conversation, every moment of connection is mediated by barriers—some intentional, some systemic, and some born of sheer indifference.

But for those of us who *also* identify as therians—we creatures who

experience a deep, intrinsic connection to a non-human self—this struggle is layered with even greater complexity. If being deaf means the world is a difficult place to navigate as a human, being a deaf critter means existing in a space that few even recognise as real. It is not just that we cannot hear as humans do—it is that we may not even fully experience ourselves as humans in the first place.

Many of us do not centre speech as our primary form of communication—instead, we rely on movement, proximity, presence, on shared instinct. This is not something that hearing society recognises as valid. It does not recognise the language of body and scent, of touch and vibration, of the flick of an ear or the lowering of a gaze. But for us, these are just as real—just as full of meaning—as words spoken aloud.

The reality is, that the world is not structured for those who move through it differently. Deaf people are expected to accommodate hearing people at every turn—to wear hearing aids, to read lips, to learn to speak enough to pass, to struggle endlessly to function in a system that will not bend for us. Accommodations are treated as a favour rather than a necessity—as though our ability to participate in society should be contingent on whether someone else finds it convenient to include us and how that inclusion is granted vs *regard*.

And if you are both deaf and a critter—if your instincts do not align with the expectations of human culture in the first place—this exclusion is even sharper. The world is designed not only for hearing humans but for humans who communicate in the narrow, linear, socially scripted ways that society dictates. If you are a deaf *therian*, as I am, as many of my kin are, I am finding—you may not just be misunderstood—you may be unintelligible to those around you.

Many of us learn to compensate. We become hyper-aware of our surroundings, finely tuned to the micro-expressions of those around us, watching the way their shoulders tense, the way their mouths move, the way their weight shifts from one foot to another. We learn to piece together meaning from fragments—sometimes catching the words, sometimes catching only the cadence, sometimes catching nothing but the way a friend glances at us with an expression that says

are you following? And sometimes, mmm nah… we aren't, we *can't*.

There is a specific kind of exhaustion in always being the one who must keep up. In being the one expected to adjust, to work harder, to "overcome" a reality that is simply the way we exist. In being the one whose ability to participate is treated as optional, depending on whether others are willing to slow down, to make space, to change their behaviour in recognition that not everyone moves through the world the same way.

Some of us have spent years—adapting, learning how to pass just enough to function, to keep up, to remain included. But that survival mechanism comes at a cost. It is draining. It is lonely. And it is never, ever seamless. There will always be moments where we miscalculate, where we miss a joke, where we fail to respond in the way someone expects, where we are left staring at moving lips and laughing faces, unsure whether we should smile along or admit, "I didn't catch that."

This is why we need spaces where we are not just accommodated but *understood*. Where we do not have to fight to be included, to be seen, to be considered. Where the ways we naturally communicate are recognised as valid, rather than as a difficulty that others must work around.

And arriving in Seattle I learned that to be deaf is not to be broken. To be a deaf critter is not to be illegible. The world may not have been built for us—but that does not mean we cannot build our own spaces, our kinship, our ways of being together.

If there is one truth that holds across all creatures, it is this: we do not survive alone.

The Exhaustion of Passing

Passing as hearing is not a conscious choice, it is a maladaptive learned survival mechanism. From an early age, we pick up on the unspoken message that society functions best when we fit in rather than disrupt the status quo. Whether through lip-reading, hyper-vigilance, or conditioned responses like

nodding along when we haven't caught a word, we learn how to minimise the discomfort of hearing people in conversations.

Lip-reading is often mistaken for an easy solution, but in reality, it is an exhausting skill that only provides partial access to communication. Studies show that even the best lip-readers can only catch about 30–40% of spoken English because so many sounds look identical on the lips.

My brain is constantly filling in gaps, making educated guesses, based on the cadence of a muffle, and trying to keep up in real-time. And don't get me started on regional dialects.

Lip reading is extremely localised. No, this takes an incredible amount of effort, and even then, misunderstandings are frequent. Body language and facial expressions help, but they are not perfect. Many deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals develop an almost instinctive ability to scan for cues—watching how a speaker moves, how their weight shifts, and how the muscles around their eyes tighten.

In a group setting it is the equivalent of a who is speaking highlighter box on a group chat. I spend an inordinate amount of energy "scanning for the green box in a crowd," in the basement of a Goth club, it's a big ask.

Lip-reading needs good light too, and social settings for humans rely on low lights and loud sound—conditions that make communication even harder. Even in perfect lighting, details like facial expressions, lip movements, and gestures help us interpret tone and meaning, but they do not replace actual words. Instead, they serve as context clues that require constant mental effort, adding another layer of work to an already difficult process.

For those of us who are both deaf *and* neurodivergent, this effort can be doubly draining. The overlap between deafness and conditions like autism and ADHD means that many of us are already dealing with sensory overload, executive dysfunction, and social exhaustion.

Our brains are constantly working overtime to process fragmented information, navigate environmental stressors and maintain interactions that others take for granted.

The expectation to track multiple sensory inputs at once—speech, movement, sound vibrations, emotional nuance, and background distractions—can push us past the limits of what is sustainable.

Even when we succeed, it comes at a cost: fatigue, migraines, and burnout. The sheer effort of keeping up can leave us too drained to enjoy social interaction, turning what should be moments of joy and *connection* into a battle for *comprehension*. And that's not fair.

We deaf critters deserve spaces where communication doesn't feel like a fight, where our ways of interacting are honoured without a constant struggle. The irony is we are not being heard.

The Emotional Toll of Pretending

The expectation to "keep up" is not just a matter of social convenience—it is often treated as a measure of intelligence or competence.

People assume that if we do not respond immediately or if we ask them to repeat themselves, we are either inattentive or slow. This was my experience as a deaf little creature-child, with an IQ lower than 62, I was destined for packing biscuits in a factory, and because of that, my teachers simply… well… gave up.

This pressure leads many of us to develop masking behaviours—smiling, nodding, offering vague responses like "Oh, yeah, totally,"—or my fave—"Huh, that makes sense," even when I have no idea what was just said.

But masking is not just a temporary act—it is a long-term habit that wears us down over time. The more we push ourselves to pretend, the more we internalise the idea that our real selves—our *real* ways of communicating—are inconvenient or unwanted.

Many deaf and hard-of-hearing creatures and people describe a specific kind of loneliness that comes from being surrounded by conversation and yet feeling completely disconnected from it. I feel it all the time... and it's corrosive to the soul, and in its wake comes a plethora of negative self-beliefs that inhibit us from even trying to socialise.

It is not the solitude of being physically alone but the isolation of

being present and surrounded by those who love you, but we are still unable to participate.

As a deaf writer, Sara Nović puts it: *"Pretending to hear is a profoundly lonely experience. It means choosing between honesty and inclusion, and sometimes you just don't have the energy to fight for both."*

Nowhere is this isolation more apparent than in other high-noise environments. These are places where hearing people engage effortlessly—where communication is supposed to be fluid, spontaneous, and easy. For us deaf creatures, they are often overwhelming, inaccessible, and alienating.

Even with hearing aids or cochlear implants, background noise drowns out speech, making it nearly impossible to follow conversations. Music, clinking glasses, overlapping voices, and sudden bursts of laughter create a wall of indistinguishable sound. Lip-Reading becomes useless when lighting is low, and gestural communication is difficult when people are moving erratically or when the environment is simply too dark

The Lie That Exists At The Heart Of Hearing Aids

Hearing aids are often seen as a simple fix, a tool that allows those of us with hearing loss to "re-enter" the world of sound. But for many profoundly deaf individuals, this is far from the reality. While hearing aids may provide some benefit for those who are hard of hearing, they are not designed for full accessibility, and in many cases, they create more problems than they solve. They are built with the assumption that amplifying sound alone is enough, yet amplification does not equate to clarity or true comprehension.

The hearing world tends to assume that any increase in volume equates to better understanding—as though deafness is simply a matter of turning the sound up. But profound deafness is not just about volume; it's about dynamics, clarity, processing, and accessibility. The brain needs to make sense of the sound, not just hear it.

A hearing aid can make the sound louder, but that does not mean it makes it any more comprehensible.

After all, more is just simply… well… more. More noise, more distortion, more strain, and often, more frustration rather than actual understanding.

Why Hearing Aids Aren't A Solution

Hearing aids do not restore hearing—as I just said, they amplify whatever residual hearing we have left. But what they amplify is not always useful.

Instead of filtering and refining sound, they often pick up everything indiscriminately. I can hear the people at the table across the room from me as well as all the other tables, at the same moment, at the same time.

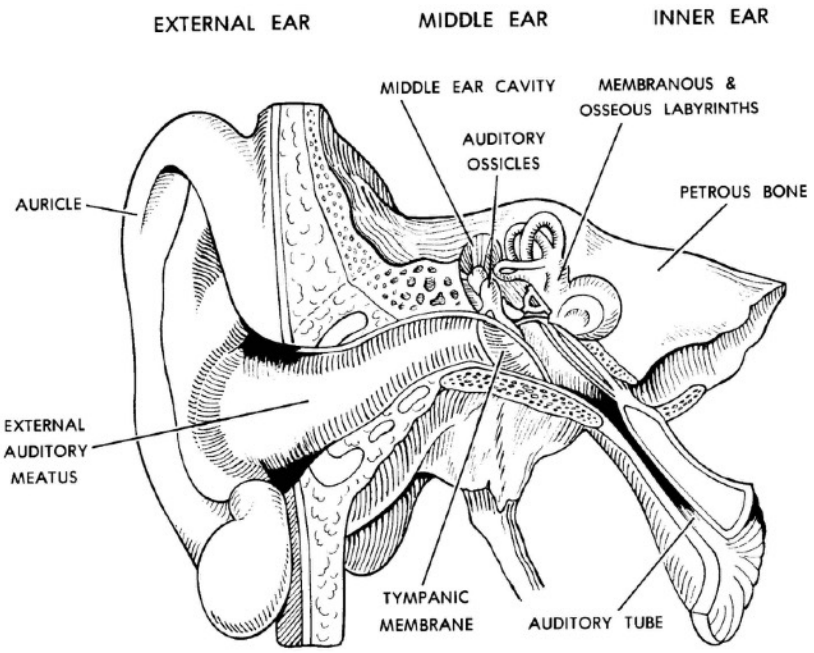
This means that instead of helping us focus on a single voice in a conversation, they boost all sounds—background noise, distant conversations, environmental sounds, wind, traffic, clinking silverware—all at once.

This is not the same as natural hearing, where the brain instinctively filters out unnecessary sounds and prioritises speech—it differentiates between voices, separates important sounds from irrelevant noise, and allows people to process conversations even in chaotic environments. Hearing aids do not do this. They increase the volume indiscriminately, making everything louder, but not necessarily clearer.

A (very) Quick Primer On How We Hear

The human ear is incredibly sophisticated. It is a complex system, composed of three primary components: mechanical, neurological, and cognitive (comprehension). Each part plays a crucial role in how humans process sound, yet for those of us who are deaf or hard of hearing, different parts of this system may function imperfectly or not at all, fundamentally altering how we experience the world.

The mechanical aspect of hearing refers to the outer and middle



ear, where sound waves are collected, funnelled, and transmitted through tiny bones (the ossicles) that amplify vibrations toward the inner ear. This is a physical, automatic process, but if the outer or middle ear is damaged—through congenital conditions, illness, or injury—sound may not reach the parts of the ear that convert it into something the brain can interpret.

The neurological component of hearing involves the inner ear (cochlea) and the auditory nerve, which translates sound waves into electrical signals that the brain can process.

If the hair cells inside the cochlea are damaged or missing, as they often are in profound deafness, these signals may never form properly or maybe so distorted that they provide no usable information. This is where hearing aids and cochlear implants attempt an intervention, though they do not restore normal hearing—they merely amplify or modify signals, often in a way that creates more confusion than clarity.

Finally, comprehension is where the brain takes those signals and makes meaning out of them. Even if sound reaches the brain, *understanding* speech requires more than just hearing—it requires context, pattern recognition, and familiarity with language.

Deaf individuals who have never had full auditory input may

struggle with this part because the brain has never developed a strong auditory map to decode speech. This is why simply making things "louder" doesn't necessarily help—if the neurological and cognitive systems are not trained to interpret sound, volume alone is meaningless.

For deaf people, the absence of sound does not mean an absence of communication—rather, it forces us to rely on visual, spatial, and tactile forms of understanding the world.

The human ear may be sophisticated, but it is not the only way to experience reality.

Imagine walking into a crowded café and turning the volume up on every single sound at once. The hum of the espresso machine, the scraping of chairs, the clatter of dishes, the low murmur of conversation—all of it increases in intensity. Now, imagine trying to pull a single voice out of that chaotic mess. For many deaf little creatures like me, this is what wearing a hearing aid feels like.

Sound Quality & Sensory Overload

The unnatural sound quality of hearing aids can be jarring, distorted, and overwhelming. They do not simply recreate the sound as a hearing person experiences it; instead, they deliver a compressed, altered version of it.

Many people describe the experience as tinny, artificial, or robotic. For neurodivergent deaf individuals, particularly those with sensory processing challenges, communication can become even more mentally and physically exhausting. Rather than bridging the gap between us and the hearing world, hearing aids often *increase* auditory overload, amplifying background noise and making conversations even harder—not easier.

Instead of enhancing understanding, they demand more cognitive effort, forcing us to sift through chaotic, unfiltered sounds just to keep up.

For some, hearing aids disproportionately amplify high-pitched frequencies while failing to adequately capture lower ones.

This distorts the natural balance of sound, creating an auditory landscape where certain noises become painfully sharp while others remain muffled or absent entirely.

Speech may technically become louder, but it loses its natural rhythm and flow, making it harder to process in real time. Even small group conversations—where multiple voices overlap—become overwhelming as the aids indiscriminately amplify all sounds at once, creating an auditory soup of conflicting information.

Instead of making social interaction easier, this distorted soundscape forces neurodivergent deaf individuals to work even harder to interpret speech patterns, contextual cues, and body language. The strain of constantly filtering through unnatural audio signals can lead to sensory fatigue, headaches, and burnout, leaving many of us feeling more isolated than before. Ultimately, the problem isn't just about volume—it's about clarity, and for many of us, hearing aids fail to provide it.

Why Do So Many Deaf Folk Reject Hearing Aids Entirely?

The goal of deafness should be to approximate hearing as closely as possible is based on an auditory world thinking we will settle for less: the assumption in the hearing world is rooted in the belief that that all deaf people should wear hearing aids.

But for many within the Deaf community, the use of hearing aids is not just a technological issue—it's a cultural and philosophical one.

Deafness is not always something that needs to be "fixed." Many deaf individuals find hearing aids uncomfortable, I find mine overstimulating, and ineffective, and instead choose to embrace non-auditory forms of communication, such as sign language, written communication, and visual cues.

As Deaf scholar Harlan Lane noted in *The Mask of Benevolence*, the push for hearing aids and other assistive devices often comes from a hearing-centric perspective, one that assumes the goal should always be integration

into hearing society, rather than allowing Deaf people to exist on their own terms.

Many members of the Deaf community reject the idea that we should have to struggle to fit into an auditory world. Instead of using devices that require constant adaptation, we choose to live fully within Deaf culture—where communication is visual, not auditory, and where deafness is not seen as a deficiency but as a different way of experiencing the universe, a different way of being.

The Pressure to Conform

The expectation to wear hearing aids is often placed on deaf individuals from an early age. Parents, teachers, doctors, and speech therapists frequently encourage, or even pressure, deaf children into using hearing aids, assuming that this will make them more independent and socially integrated. The expectation is that by amplifying sound, these devices will bridge the gap between deaf and hearing worlds, allowing seamless participation.

However, the assumption that hearing aids will automatically improve quality of life does not hold true for everyone. Many deaf individuals grow up resenting their hearing aids—viewing them not as tools of empowerment, but as constant reminders of a world that refuses to meet them where they are. Instead of fostering inclusion, they often reinforce isolation, making deaf children feel like their natural state is inadequate, something to be "fixed."

For those of us who have tried and struggled with hearing aids, the choice to stop wearing them can feel both liberating and terrifying. There is always the fear that rejecting them means rejecting connection, losing the chance to be included in conversations and social spaces. But the truth is, for many of us, hearing aids *do not* provide connection—they provide *exhaustion*. They force us into a state of constant strain, trying to parse unnatural, overstimulated sound while still being treated as "not hearing enough..."

…and at the end of the day, if the world is not willing to accommodate us fully, no device is going to change that.

Finding Acceptance Over Exhaustion

Hearing aids are not inherently bad—for some, they provide just enough sound to help with daily interactions. But for many more profoundly deaf individuals, they are not a miracle solution. The expectation that all deaf people should wear them assumes that the burden of adaptation should fall entirely on us, rather than on society learning to accommodate our natural ways of communication.

For those of us who experience deafness as something intrinsic, rather than something to be corrected, hearing aids are often more of a hindrance than a help. Choosing not to wear them is not a sign of giving up—it is a recognition that we deserve to exist as we are, without constantly fighting to fit into a world that refuses to listen.

Therian Identity: Going Nonverbal

For many therians-nonverbal communication serves as a profound bridge between our human experiences and the instincts of our animal counterparts.

This form of interaction, rooted in movement, body language, and sensory cues, offers a unique lens through which therians navigate both their internal identities and external environments.

Therians often report an innate draw towards nonverbal modes of communication, mirroring the behaviours of the animals they identify with. This can manifest in various ways such as

• **Body Posture and Gestures**: Adopting stances or movements reminiscent of their animal counterparts, such as a wolf therian maintaining direct eye contact or a feline therian exhibiting fluid, graceful motions.

• **Facial Expressions and Vocalisations:** Utilising subtle facial cues or specific sounds to convey emotions or intentions without relying on spoken language.

These instinctive behaviours not only facilitate personal expression but also foster a deeper connection with we who share experiences.

Animal Communication Parallels

In the animal kingdom, nonverbal cues are paramount, forming the backbone of communication for countless species. Wolves, for example, rely on subtle body language to convey status, emotion, and intent. A lowered stance and averted gaze can signal submission, while a rigid posture, raised hackles, or bared teeth indicate dominance or aggression. Birds, on the other hand, communicate through plumage displays, coordinated flight—specific movements—from elaborate mating dances to subtle shifts in wing position that maintain harmony within a flock.

Even within species that vocalise frequently, body language and movement often carry more weight than sound. Rabbits thump the ground to warn others of danger, but a tense posture or flick of the ears can signal unease just as clearly. Felines use slow blinking to express trust, while foxes communicate excitement, submission, or warning through tail positioning and ear flicks. These cues are instinctual and deeply ingrained, forming a language that does not rely on spoken words.

Therians, especially those who are deaf or neurodivergent, may find themselves naturally adopting or resonating with these forms of communication.

Many therians report an instinctive reliance on body language, physical proximity, scent, or touch rather than speech, mirroring the creatures they identify with. The deep-seated connection to their nonhuman identities can shape the way we interact socially, favouring movement, gesture, and expression over verbal exchange.

For deaf therians, this alignment with nonverbal communication becomes even more significant. Where the hearing world priorities speech, the animal world does not. Instead, meaning is conveyed through presence, through a glance, a shift in posture, a moment of stillness.

This resonates deeply with those who experience language through visual and tactile means, reinforcing the idea that communication does not have to be auditory to be meaningful, and even enhancing the way we do and can communicate without sound.

Experiences: Overload & Underload

Many therians describe heightened or diminished sensory perceptions that align with their animal identifications.

These sensory shifts lead to experiences of overload or under-load:

• **Sensory Overload:** An overwhelming influx of sensory stimuli, leading to distress or discomfort. For example, a therian might find bustling environments overstimulating, akin to an animal's heightened alertness in unfamiliar territories.

• **Sensory Under-load:** A diminished sensory input, resulting in a craving for stimulation. This can manifest as a profound desire for tactile interactions or specific sensory experiences.

One of my closest therian friends shared with me: "*My sensory shifts are intense. I struggle to process multiple sounds at once, and strong smells can be overwhelming. When it becomes too much, I often react by covering my ears and snapping at those around me, but the experience is distressing.*"

Such experiences underscore the complex interplay between therian identities and sensory processing.

The Craving for The Tactile

A recurring theme among deaf therians alike is the yearning for physical touch, which serves as a grounding mechanism and a means of connection:

• **Seeking Pressure Stimulation**: Some therians find comfort in deep pressure, reminiscent of animals seeking close contact within packs or litters. I especially need this.

• **Affinity for Specific Textures:** Engaging with materials or environments that provide sensory satisfaction, such as soft fabrics or natural settings.

This "hunger for touch" parallels behaviours observed in many animals, where physical contact is essential for bonding, social cohesion, and even survival. Wolves nuzzle and groom one another to

reinforce pack bonds, primates engage in social grooming to build trust, and birds preen their mates as an act of affection.

For therians, especially those who experience heightened sensory awareness, touch is not just about physical sensation—it is about reassurance, grounding, and connection. In a world that often prioritises verbal communication, the absence of meaningful physical contact can feel like a form of isolation, making tactile connection even more essential.

The Depth of Nonverbal Bonds

The reliance on nonverbal communication among therians highlights a fundamental truth: meaningful connections transcend spoken language. For many, the most profound interactions are not found in words, but in shared experiences of movement, touch, and sensory engagement.

A subtle shift in posture, a lingering glance, or the brush of a hand can convey emotions and intentions more clearly than speech ever could. These instinctive forms of communication create a language beyond words, one that is deeply felt rather than spoken, reinforcing bonds in ways that feel natural, primal, and true to their identities.

For deaf and neurodivergent therians, this nonverbal connection is even more essential, providing a means of expression that does not demand exhausting adaptation to spoken dialogue.

Just as animals rely on gestures, proximity, and body positioning to signal trust, dominance, comfort, or playfulness, therians cultivate relationships rooted in mutual understanding and resonance.

In embracing these nonverbal modes of interaction, therians not only honour their intrinsic identities but also challenge conventional notions of communication. The expectation that words must always be the primary mode of connection is a human construct—one that excludes those who communicate differently.

By rejecting this limitation, therians illustrate the diverse ways in which beings can connect, relate, and build kinship, proving that understanding runs deeper than language.

It is felt, it is sensed, and for those willing to listen beyond words, it is everywhere.

Deafness, Neurodivergence, and Sensory Overload: A Therian Perspective

Navigating the world as a deaf, neurodivergent therian presents unique challenges, as these intersecting identities create sensory experiences that are both overwhelming and isolating. Many of us exist at the crossroads of multiple marginalised identities, constantly adapting to a world that was not built with us in mind.

The sensory landscape we move through is often chaotic, overwhelming, and full of barriers that most people do not see. For those of us who identify as therians—experiencing an intrinsic connection to non-human animals—these challenges can feel even *more* pronounced, as our heightened awareness of movement, sound, and space can parallel the acute sensory perceptions of the animals we identify with.

Understanding how deafness, neurodivergence, and therian identity intersect is crucial for making sense of these experiences and developing strategies for self-preservation in environments that frequently disregard our needs.

The Intersection of Deafness and Neurodivergence

Deafness and neurodivergence often interact in complex and understudied ways—particularly regarding auditory processing and sensory regulation.

Some deaf individuals experience Auditory Processing Disorder (APD), a condition where the brain struggles to process and interpret sounds effectively, even if there is some degree of residual hearing. This means that even when sounds are heard, they may be distorted, scrambled, or difficult to separate from background noise.

For neurodivergent individuals, including those with autism or

ADHD, auditory processing can be equally unpredictable.

Many autistic individuals experience hyperacusis (sound sensitivity), difficulty filtering speech from background noise, or delays in processing spoken words. Loud, crowded spaces can quickly become unbearable, and the constant effort to process and interpret auditory information can lead to cognitive fatigue, shutdowns, or meltdowns.

For deaf, neurodivergent therians, these struggles are further complicated by our instinctive ways of processing the world. Many of us experience heightened sensory awareness as part of our therian identity—an alignment with non-human animals who rely on acute environmental perception for survival. This might mean we are more attuned to small visual cues, movement, or shifts in energy, but it can also mean that sensory overload hits harder and faster.

Therians, Sensory Processing, and Animalistic Awareness

Animals rely on heightened sensory input for survival, and many therians report a similar intense sensitivity to environmental stimuli.

Some describe feeling more attuned to subtle shifts in air pressure, temperature changes, vibrations, or the presence of others in a room. While these instincts can be a gift—allowing for deeper, intuitive engagement with the world—they can also be a curse when paired with sensory overload and the demands of human society.For example:

• A wolf therian might feel overwhelmed in a crowded environment due to an instinctual need for clear spatial awareness, finding it difficult to focus when surrounded by unpredictable movement.

• A bird therian might struggle with loud, chaotic noise, as certain pitches of sound may feel physically painful, mirroring the heightened auditory sensitivity of many avian species.

• A rabbit or prey-animal therian may find sudden environmental changes deeply unsettling, their nervous system reacting with an instinctual fight-or-flight response to perceived threats, even in

spaces where there is no actual danger. This animalistic sensory awareness, when combined with deafness and neurodivergence, can make many everyday environments intolerable. It is not just about discomfort—it is about being unable to function in spaces that are too loud, too bright, too chaotic, too overwhelming.

Survival Strategies in an Overwhelming World

For deaf and neurodivergent therians, navigating human society often leads to an inescapable conclusion that we need to be developing survival strategies to avoid complete sensory burnout. Some of these strategies might include:

Controlled environments – Choosing to spend time in smaller, quieter social spaces rather than large public events.

Visual-first communication – Engaging in sign language, body language, and movement-based expression instead of relying on spoken words.

Tactile grounding techniques – Using touch, pressure, or physical objects to regulate sensory input (such as weighted blankets, textured fabrics, or grounding stims).

Therian coping mechanisms – Allowing for small shifts into instinctual movement or behaviour to regulate overstimulation (such as flicking ears in a phantom shift, stimming like a feline kneading, or engaging in deep-pressure contact with trusted pack-mates).

Clear communication needs – Being open with close friends and partners about what environments are accessible and what spaces are not, instead of forcing ourselves into situations that harm us.

These strategies help mitigate some of the challenges of existing as a deaf, neurodivergent, therian individual in a world not built for us, but they do not erase the fundamental inaccessibility of modern life. More than coping mechanisms, we need systemic changes that recognise our right to exist as we are—without constant exhaustion, isolation, or sensory harm.

In the end, our goal should not be to just survive but to build a

world where we can thrive—one where we do not have to fight for inclusion, where our needs are met with understanding rather than dismissal, and where our instincts, our neurodivergence, and our deafness aren't treated as burdens, but as integral parts of who we are.

Inaccessibility of Environments Despite Accommodations

Even with accommodations, some environments remain inaccessible to the deaf, neurodivergent, or both. Public spaces like shopping malls, public transportation, and social gatherings often present overwhelming sensory stimuli, including loud noise, bright light, crowded spaces.

These factors can create barriers that accommodations like sign language interpreters or hearing aids cannot fully address. For therians, these environments can be particularly challenging. Our intrinsic connection to animal instincts may heighten our sensitivity to environmental stimuli, making crowded or noisy settings feel threatening or unbearable. Sometimes to my parter's frustration I simply just wander off in a critterspace. This heightened awareness can also, conversely lead to a state of hyper-vigilance, where I personally am constantly on edge, anticipating sensory assaults. Moreover, societal expectations often do not account for the unique needs of those at the intersection of deafness, neurodivergence, and therian identity. The lack of understanding and accommodations can result in feelings of exclusion and isolation, as the standard measures fail to create truly accessible environments.

Strategies for Navigating Overstimulation and Isolation

Developing effective strategies to manage sensory overload and mitigate isolation is essential for individuals navigating these intersecting identities. Some approaches include

Creating Sensory-Friendly Spaces: I've mentioned before, designating areas with controlled sensory input provides vital refuge from

overstimulating environments, offering deaf, neurodivergent, and therian individuals a space where we do not have to be on constant high alert. For many of us, navigating the human world is exhausting, filled with jarring sounds, harsh lights, and social expectations that clash with our instincts.

Having dedicated areas designed with sensory and instinctual needs in mind creates safe havens where we can exist without strain.

This includes using dim but directed, warm lighting instead of fluorescent or oscillating overhead lights, which can be disorienting and harsh. Minimising background noise is also crucial—many neurodivergent individuals struggle with auditory processing in loud, chaotic spaces, and for deaf people using hearing aids or cochlear implants, excessive noise can be painful and overwhelming.

Providing soft, natural sounds, like rustling leaves or gentle water movement, can make spaces more grounding, especially for those whose theriotypes align with environments where subtle background noise is a normal part of awareness.

Beyond just sensory regulation, incorporating friendly environments in line with our theriotypes fosters a sense of belonging.

A space designed for a wolf therian might prioritise open layouts, clear sight-lines, and cozy, enclosed resting areas, mirroring den-like comfort. A bird therian may feel more at ease in high, open spaces with natural airflow, while a prey-animal therian might need spaces with multiple exits, soft materials, and places to retreat when overwhelmed.

By considering both accessibility and instinctual needs, we create spaces that go beyond basic accommodation and instead allow us to exist comfortably, authentically, and without unnecessary stress.

Building a More Inclusive World for Deaf, Neurodivergent Therians

Mainstream society still struggles to understand deafness, neurodivergence, and nonverbal communication—let alone the way these intersect with therian identity.

As I hinted at several times earlier, many existing accommodations are designed for a specific, limited concept of *disability*, rather than recognising the full spectrum of sensory experiences that shape how individuals interact with their environment.

For deaf therians, this means that even when accessibility measures are in place, they often fail to accommodate the fundamental ways we experience and process the world.

Accommodations tend to focus on either hearing accessibility (like hearing aids and interpreters) or neurodivergent-friendly adjustments (such as quiet spaces and sensory regulation tools)—but not on how these two needs combine.

For instance, many neurodivergent people find fluorescent lighting overwhelming, but dim lighting can make lip-reading impossible for deaf individuals. Similarly, background music in public spaces can make it difficult for neurodivergent individuals to filter sounds, but for deaf therians, it can completely erase the small vibrations they rely on for environmental awareness.

This lack of flexibility in accommodations mirrors the rigid way the human world expects communication to function—a way that fundamentally does not align with how animals, and by extension, many therians, interact with one another.

The Difference Between Human and Therian Communication

In human society, verbal speech is seen as the highest and most necessary form of communication. While written and sign languages exist, they are often treated as secondary. People. Expect. Speech.

They expect linear, verbal exchanges.

They expect eye contact, immediate responses, and a shared understanding of social norms.

For therians, however, speech is often not the primary way of engaging with others. Many of us, whether deaf or hearing, feel more comfortable with movement or sensory-based communication. This aligns with how many animals communicate:

• Wolves and Canines: Rely on body language, scent, and subtle shifts in energy to express emotions and maintain social bonds. Growls, whines, ear positioning, and body postures carry as much weight as vocalisations.
• Felines: Often use slow blinks, tail flicks, and scent-marking to communicate mood and intent rather than producing loud sounds.
• Birds: While many birds do vocalise, much of their social communication is based on flock movement, spatial awareness, and even feather positioning.

This means that for deaf therians, the way we naturally engage with others is already deeply aligned with nonverbal, movement-based interactions—yet the human world demands that we participate in ways that feel unnatural, even impossible, at times.

Breaking Free from the Exhaustion of Adaptation

For many of us, our entire lives have been about adaptation. Whether that's trying to pass as hearing by lip-reading and masking misunderstandings, trying to pass as neurotypical by suppressing sensory needs, or trying to pass as "normal" by hiding therian behaviours and instincts.

Each of these forces us to shrink ourselves, to deny our most authentic ways of experiencing and engaging with the world. And at some point, many of us hit a breaking point—the realisation that we cannot, and should not, keep pushing ourselves to fit into a world that refuses to meet us halfway.

Instead, we must build our own spaces, our own accommodations, and follow our own methods of interaction that honour how we actually exist.

This means creating and advocating for sensory-friendly spaces that consider both deafness and neurodivergence—validating nonverbal communication and energy-based interactions as just as meaningful as verbal speech and recognising that accessibility should be about more than just survival—it should be about creating environments where we thrive, connect, and be seen as ourselves.

We Will Not Survive Alone

One of the most important lessons that both therians and non-human animals teach us is that no creature survives alone. Whether in packs, warrens, prides, or flocks, animals rely on one another for survival and connection—and so do we.

The human world may never fully accommodate us, but that doesn't mean we have to keep forcing ourselves to function in ways that harm us. Instead, we must build our own spaces, find our own kin, and embrace the ways of being that feel most true to us.

By considering both accessibility and instinctual needs, we create spaces that go far beyond basic accommodation and instead allow us to exist comfortably, authentically, and without unnecessary stress.

These spaces are not just about making survival easier; they are about ensuring that we, as deaf and neurodivergent therians, have places where we can thrive, connect, and feel at home in a world not built for us.

Because in the end, we do not need to change who we are to be worthy of connection and care. The world may not have been built for us—but we can build something better, together.

Accessibility is a Right!

Accessibility is frequently misconstrued as an optional amenity rather than an essential right. This misperception is deeply ingrained in society, shaping policies, public spaces, and social attitudes in ways that consistently undermine the autonomy and inclusion of marginalised communities.

It is particularly evident among groups who exist outside of mainstream expectations—those who are deaf, neurodivergent, or who identify as therians—whose needs are often dismissed as secondary or even invisible.

For deaf individuals, accessibility is often framed as "special assistance" rather than a basic necessity. Public spaces, workplaces, and social environments are overwhelmingly designed for spoken

communication, making it difficult for deaf people to fully participate without additional effort or adaptation.

Even when accommodations such as captioning, sign language interpreters, or text-based communication exist, they are often implemented inconsistently, as though accessibility is a favour rather than a structural requirement.

Neurodivergent individuals face similar challenges. Sensory-friendly environments, alternative communication methods, and flexible participation structures are still seen as optional accommodations rather than necessary infrastructure.

The expectation remains that neurodivergent individuals must adapt to environments that are inherently harmful to them, rather than society making an effort to design spaces that recognise diverse ways of processing the world.

For therians, the lack of recognition is even more pronounced. Because therianthropy is not widely understood, there is little acknowledgment of the ways in which accessibility might be redefined through an instinctive, nonverbal, or sensory-based framework.

Many therians experience heightened sensory awareness, different social needs, or alternative modes of movement and interaction—yet public spaces continue to impose rigid, human-centric standards of behaviour and communication that make it harder for them to navigate and participate authentically.

The systemic oversight in accommodating these groups not only perpetuates exclusion but also underscores a fundamental misunderstanding of accessibility's role in forming an equitable society. True accessibility is not an afterthought—it is the foundation of a world where all beings, regardless of hearing ability, neuro-type, or way of experiencing the world, can exist without struggle. It requires shifting away from a compliance-based model—where accommodations are only provided when legally required—to an ethos of universal design, where inclusivity is embedded from the beginning.

Until accessibility is treated as a shared responsibility rather than

an individual burden, we will continue to experience systemic neglect and forced adaptation.

It is time to stop viewing accessibility as an optional upgrade and start recognising it for what it truly is: a necessary, non-negotiable aspect of any just and inclusive society.

Audism and Accessibility as "Optional"

The prevailing societal attitudes often frames accessibility measures as benevolent gestures rather than obligatory provisions.

This perspective is deeply ingrained in various facets of daily life, from public infrastructure to workplace policies. For instance, many public venues lack sensory-friendly environments, despite the fact that such accommodations are vital for neurodivergent individuals who may experience sensory overload.

A study published in Autism in Adulthood emphasises that "*many individuals on the autism spectrum are hypersensitive to certain sensory stimuli," and exposure to such stimuli can be distressing and debilitating.*

Similarly, the concept of "audism"—discrimination against deaf individuals—illustrates how societal norms prioritise hearing individuals, often neglecting the communication needs of the deaf community. An article from Hand Talk explains that audism perpetuates the notion that being hearing is synonymous with normalcy, by marginalising those who are deaf or hard of hearing. For therians, the challenge is compounded by a general lack of awareness and understanding of their identity. Therianthropy is often misunderstood or dismissed, leading to a lack of consideration for our unique experiences and needs.

Frustration Being Considered a Burden

We are frequently met with resistance or made to feel burdensome when we advocate for necessary accommodations.

This reaction not only invalidates our experiences but also places undue pressure on us to conform to normative standards.

We should be acknowledging the importance of hearing and allistic (non-autistic) individuals making efforts to bridge communication gaps and meet halfway.

We therians, too encounter similar challenges. The lack of recognition and understanding of therianthropy can result in our needs being overlooked or dismissed, leading to feelings of isolation and frustration. A study exploring the well-being of individuals who self-identify as non-human found that therians scored lower on variables associated with positive social relationships, highlighting the social challenges they face.

Defining "True Accessibility"

True accessibility transcends mere physical modifications; it encompasses an inclusive mindset that recognises and respects diverse experiences and needs. For deaf individuals, this means more than just providing sign language interpreters—it involves fostering environments where deaf culture and communication methods are valued and integrated. Addressing audism and promoting the use of sign languages are critical steps toward achieving this goal.

For neurodivergent individuals, true accessibility requires creating sensory-friendly spaces that accommodate hypersensitivities.

Advocates for the right to a hypersensitivity-friendly workspace very often prioritise emphasising that exposure to certain sensory stimuli can be tormenting for individuals with sensory processing disorders. In the context of therianthropy, true accessibility involves acknowledging and respecting non-traditional forms of identity and communication.

This could mean creating spaces where non-verbal communication is understood and valued, and where individuals can express their identities without fear of misunderstanding or discrimination.

Ironically, recognising therianthropy as a legitimate aspect of *human* diversity is essential in promoting inclusivity. So, reframing

accessibility as an inherent right rather than a discretionary favour is imperative for cultivating an inclusive society.

This shift necessitates a collective commitment to understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalised communities, including deaf, neurodivergent, and therian individuals. By actively dismantling barriers and fostering environments that honour diverse experiences, society moves closer to genuine equity and inclusivity.

The Loneliness of Social Exclusion

Social exclusion profoundly impacts individuals across various marginalised communities, including therians.

While theianism is not a disability, the social dynamics that lead to exclusion share profound similarities with those experienced by other marginalised groups. Understanding these dynamics is crucial to fostering inclusivity and empathy.

The heartbreak of watching us engage in inaccessible activities is something I experience on a daily basis, both as observer and receiver. For many therians, social gatherings often centre around environments that feel incongruent with their identities. Activities that emphasise human-centric behaviours can intensify feelings of disconnection.

This sentiment is echoed in broader marginalised communities, where individuals may find themselves unable to participate fully due to cultural or personal differences. This sense of not belonging can lead to isolation, as therians may choose to forgo social events that exacerbate their feelings of alienation.

Social exclusion often arises not from intentional discrimination but from a lack of awareness or understanding. Friends and acquaintances may not realise that certain environments or activities are uncomfortable or inaccessible to us. This results in *unintentional exclusion*, where the needs and preferences of therians are overlooked.

A discussion on the Therian Guide forum addresses the issue of gatekeeping within the community:

"*The ethics of excluding individuals or groups over reasons arbitrary whilst arguing against exclusion for other individuals or groups is hypocrisy*."

This statement underscores the importance of inclusivity and the need to be mindful of unintentional exclusionary practices, both within and outside the therian community.

Ways to Connect Without Exhaustion

To mitigate feelings of isolation, therians and members of other marginalised communities often seek alternative means of connection that align with their identities and comfort levels. Online platforms, for instance, have become vital spaces for therians to share experiences and build supportive networks.

The emergence of online communities provides a sanctuary:

"*Therianthropy is a thriving, though perhaps not well-understood, culture that has flourished in an increasingly online world, where therians can more easily find each other and openly relate about their identities.*"

"My kid is an animal: Furries and Therians in child development" by Jason Steadman, Psy.D., published on April 11, 2024

Engaging in activities that resonate with their therian identity, such as nature walks or creative arts, allows individuals to connect with others without compromising their sense of self. These alternatives not only provide social interaction but also affirm and validate their identities. So while social exclusion remains a challenge for therians and other marginalised groups, understanding the underlying dynamics and seeking alternative.

Building a vibrant and inclusive community is *essential* for deaf and disabled therians—individuals who identify deeply with non- human animals. By creating spaces that honour our unique modes of communication and interaction, we can foster environments where everyone feels understood and valued.

The Importance of Community

Community serves as the cornerstone for individuals navigating the intersection of therian identity and disabilities.

Shared experiences and mutual understanding provide a foundation for support and belonging. Online platforms have become instrumental in this endeavour, offering spaces where therians can connect, share stories, and build relationships. As is highlighted in a study on virtual spaces intended for otherkin and Therian in the Virtual Space:

"*The purpose of this study was to understand how the Therian and Otherkin subcultures use virtual spaces.*"

Gagliardi, N. R. (2016). Otherkin and Therian in the Virtual Space: Communicating Identities of the Private and Public Self. International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings, 73(1).

This research paper aimed to explore how individuals within the Therian and Otherkin communities utilise various environments to develop their sense of self and communicate their identities. The study analysed video blogs (vlogs) from twenty YouTube users identifying as Therian or Otherkin, revealing themes such as community building, the use of dress to connect with an identity, and a sense of societal disconnection due to expressing our selves.

These digital communities allow members to express themselves authentically, free from external judgments or misunderstandings. Moreover, the presence of disabled therians within the community underscores the importance of inclusivity. One deaf therian friend shared:

"The therian community has a high number of neurodivergent people. I am physically disabled as well in several ways—welcome to the community."

So many of us are! Such testimonials highlight the community's diversity and the need for spaces that cater to varied experiences.

Adapting & Reclaiming Communication

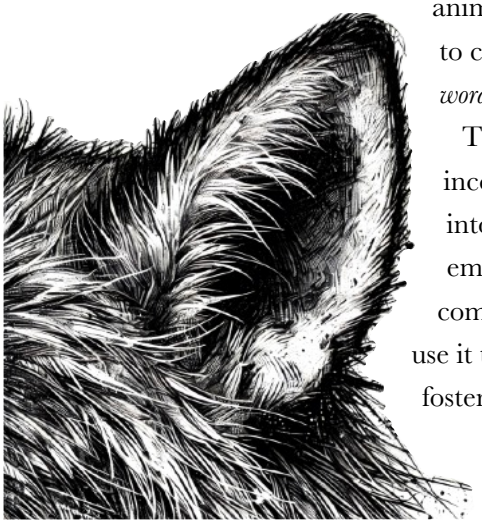
For deaf therians, traditional modes of human communication may not fully encapsulate our expressive needs.

Sign languages, rich in visual and spatial elements, resonate deeply with the non-verbal cues prevalent in animal communication. The American Deaf community, for instance, values American Sign Language (ASL) as a core aspect of its identity, this is from an article *"Deaf Culture & Community*" published by Hands & Voices:
"Through ASL, members are given a unique medium for personal expression, a spatial and visual language that does not require the use of sound and emphasizes hands, faces, bodies, and eyes."

This emphasis on non-verbal communication mirrors the ways many animals interact, allowing deaf therians to bridge their human experiences with their animal identities seamlessly.

Furthermore, the concept of morphism in sign language showcases the adaptability and creativity inherent in Deaf culture. Deaf individuals often incorporate elements of animals or objects into their expressions, a practice that aligns with therian tendencies to embody animalistic traits:

From the website handspeak.com, the article *Signing with Animals,* showcases concepts that aligns with discussions on the adaptability and creativity inherent in sign languages, exploring how humans and animals use different articulators of their bodies to communicate, noting that *"a pet can understand words in signed language as much as spoken language."*



This reflects the broader idea of incorporating elements from various sources into sign language communication. By embracing and adapting these natural communication methods, we deaf therians can use it to reclaim our expressive autonomy, fostering deeper connections within our communities.

Building Inclusive Settings

Creating social environments where no one feels left behind requires intentional efforts to accommodate diverse needs. Drawing inspiration from Deaf culture, the establishment of Deaf clubs has historically provided spaces for socialisation, education, and cultural expression.

Deaf clubs have long been a cornerstone of Deaf culture, providing more than just a meeting place—but vibrant community hubs where the Deaf could gather, celebrate, and connect in a world designed for the hearing. As the National Deaf Life Museum at Gallaudet University notes:

"*A 'Deaf club' was more than a place for card games and conversation. Clubs hosted social events as varied as holiday parties, lectures, fundraisers, plays, and performances by traveling Deaf comedians.*"

National Deaf Life Museum, Gallaudet University. "History Through Deaf Eyes – Deaf Clubs and Their Role in Deaf Social Life." Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C. Accessed March 25, 2025.

These clubs fostered a sense of belonging, offering a space where Deaf identity and language could thrive, free from the pressures of assimilation into the hearing world.

Similarly, therian communities can benefit from dedicated spaces —both physical and virtual—that prioritise accessibility and inclusivity. This involves not only physical accommodations but also fostering an environment of understanding for diverse identities.

By promoting awareness and understanding, we can work towards social settings that celebrate diversity and ensure that every member feels valued and included.

The creation of spaces that honour the unique experiences of deaf and disabled therians is paramount. Through community-building, adaptation of natural communication methods, and intentional inclusivity, we can cultivate environments where everyone thrives. By drawing inspiration from established cultural practices and advocating for accessibility, we pave the way for a more inclusive and understanding society.

Reclaiming Socialisation

Mainstream human socialising is loud, crowded, and dominated by speech. For a deaf therian, this can feel like constant exclusion, even among those who care about us. The assumption that spoken words are the only valid form of conversation leaves us isolated in ways many people never even notice. But we are not alone in this struggle.

As I have stressed several times earlier, many animals rely on nonverbal, sensory, and movement-based communication—wolves feel each other's presence through proximity and body language, birds synchronise murmuration and flight through subtle shifts in motion, rabbits thump warnings through vibration in the ground. These are natural, intuitive forms of communication that do not demand hearing, and they resonate deeply with deaf therians.

Our social environments should reflect these instincts. They should centre movement, touch, vibration, and visual connection. They should allow for quiet, unhurried conversations in spaces where body language and expression are valued just as much as words.

Sensory-Friendly and Accessible Gathering Spaces

For many of us, mainstream social spaces are actively hostile to our sensory needs. Nightclubs, bars, and concerts may be spaces of joy for some, but for deaf and neurodivergent therians, they are often places of isolation and sensory overload. The flashing lights, overlapping conversations, and chaotic energy do not accommodate our ways of experiencing the world.

Instead, we need spaces designed *for* us, *by* us. This means five basic needs to be met:

- Quiet, dimly lit environments: sensory overwhelm is minimised.
- Spaces where speech is optional, and where nonverbal interaction is seen as the norm.

• Physical closeness, safe touch, and movement as natural elements of social connection.

• Acceptance of stimming, fidgeting, and other self-regulating behaviours that make socialising more comfortable.

• A rejection of pressure to "pass" or conform—no expectation to use hearing aids, force speech, or mimic hearing norms.

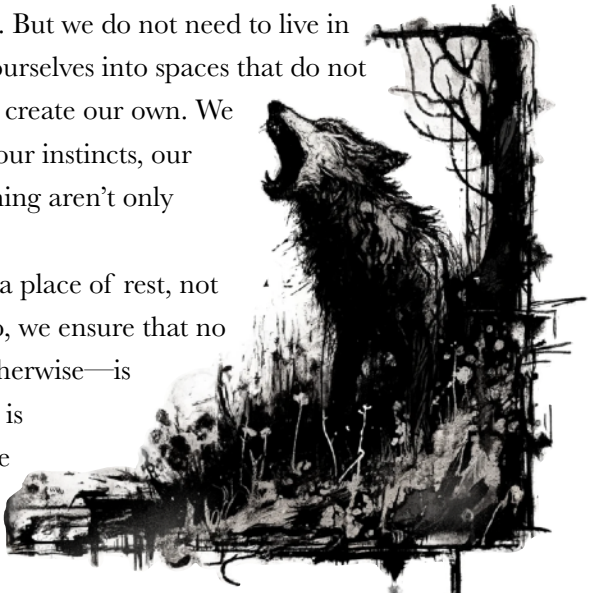
In these settings, no one has to fight to be understood. There is no pretending to hear, no struggling to keep up, no forced effort to make oneself small for the comfort of others.

Online Spaces: Havens for Connection

We must recognise that different forms of socialising work for different creatures.

For many deaf therians, the internet is a refuge, allowing us to interact in ways that do not exhaust us. Online spaces remove the pressure of verbal communication, making room for text-based and visual interactions where we can engage on our own terms. Here, we can build kinship without straining to fit into hearing society. Forums, Discord servers, and group chats become our packs, flocks, and warrens—places where we're seen, known, where we belong.

To be a deaf therian is to exist at an intersection of marginalisation—one where we are often unseen by both the hearing and therian communities. But we do not need to live in exile. Instead of forcing ourselves into spaces that do not accommodate us, we can create our own. We can build a world where our instincts, our bodies, our ways of reaching aren't only accepted, but *celebrated*.



We can make kinship a place of rest, not struggle. And in doing so, we ensure that no one—deaf, therian, or otherwise—is ever left behind, and that is something *necessary* to take away from my little howl.

My personal Journey:
A Deaf Little Critter Among Humans

For most of my life, I have been passing. Passing as hearing, passing as someone who could adapt seamlessly to a world built around sound. But the truth is, I have always existed at the edges of comprehension—catching fragments of speech, filling in the gaps, straining to stay afloat in a sea of voices that were never meant for me.

I am not alone in this. Deaf and hard-of-hearing people around the world are taught from childhood that our success, our inclusion, our very place in society depends on how well we can approximate the hearing norm. We are given hearing aids, speech therapy, and training in lip-reading, all with the understanding that we must work —always work—to be more palatable to those who hear. We are rarely given the choice to simply exist as we are.

But I realize I need more tactility than I get among most audists.

The friars at my special needs school used to hold me gently while I screamed and howled at the sound of the world going. Before the quiet came in fully, before the hearing loss settled into me like a second skin, it was worse. It was worse because I could still hear in that fractured, untranslatable way—sound like splinters, like glass cracking in water.

I would thrash, sometimes. Sometimes I just froze. My limbs locked up, but inside I was keening. They learned not to speak to me then. Instead, they'd come to me with patience—Brother Joseph, or Brother Mark. They had a way about them. No words, just presence. One of them would press two fingers into the center of my palm. Firm. Gentle. Not asking, just offering. And when I could, I'd close my fist around them like they were rope and I was adrift. And in those moments, even when my body was still screaming, some part of me quieted. I didn't understand what it was then. Just that there was steadiness in the contact. Just that I was not floating alone in the dark.

Sometimes I'd panic and squeeze too hard, leave nail marks on their knuckles, but they never pulled away. That tactile anchor—those

two fingers—became more effective than any speech ever could have been. It was how I began to map safety: not through sound or sight, but through skin, through pressure and presence. They were the first to teach me that touch, when not used to punish or control, could become a kind of sacred language. One I needed more than I could ever explain.

Even now, all these years later, my body remembers. I find myself still aching for that contact, that steady weight of hand in hand, not delicate but grounded, real. I still need more touch than I get. The deficit sits in me like hunger, like thirst. My partners don't always understand it, how my body curls toward them in sleep like ivy reaching for stone. How even when I don't say it, I'm always reaching, always remembering. I think my nervous system was built on that palm-and-finger catechism.

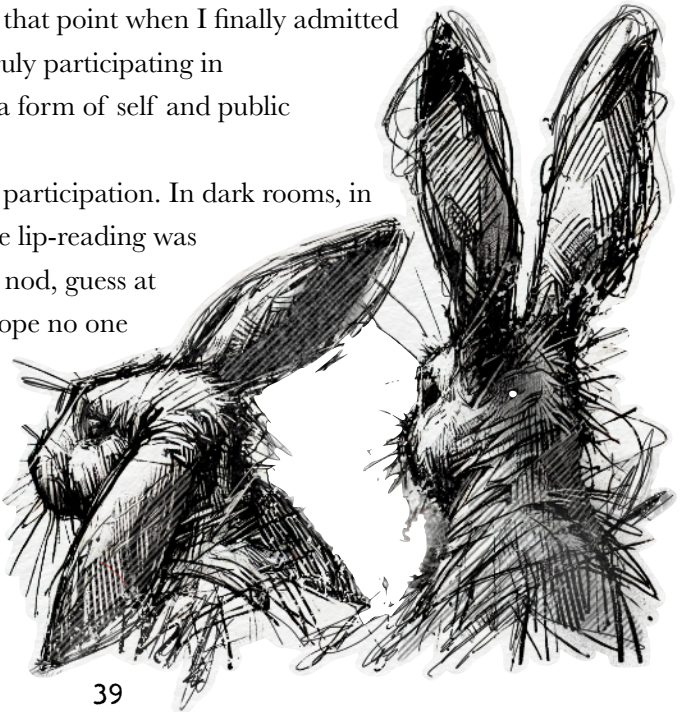
And that memory, that first shared stillness inside the chaos, is maybe the calmest and holiest thing I've known.

Living as a Deaf Little Critter

There comes a point when the struggle to pass, to pretend, becomes too exhausting. I recently reached that point when I finally admitted to myself that I was not truly participating in conversations, that it was a form of self and public deception.

I was merely imitating participation. In dark rooms, in loud clubs, in places where lip-reading was impossible, I would smile, nod, guess at the right responses, and hope no one noticed the cracks in my illusion of understanding.

But that is not living. That is not connection. That is performance, and I cannot perform anymore.



Letting go of my hearing aids is not just about comfort; it is about reclaiming my reality. It is about choosing to live as I am, rather than exhausting myself trying to be something I am not. It is about acknowledging that I am not broken, I just perceive the world differently. The world is simply not built for me, but now, I am no longer willing to bend myself to fit into its mould.

Therianthropy has helped me rationalise this more clearly. As a therian, I do not experience my being as entirely human—I exist at the intersection of creature and person, of instinct and thought.

Animals do not apologise for their ways of perceiving the world; they do not try to adapt to a reality that does not accommodate them. A wolf does not ask for permission to hear differently; a rabbit does not explain why it relies on movement and vibration instead of speech. They simply exist as they are. And so must I.

Letting Go and Moving Forward

Letting go of my hearing aids also means letting go of certain spaces.

I will never be *fully* present in loud bars or music venues. I will never be able to track conversations at a crowded party. There will always be places where I cannot function, and that is painful. It means watching my friends go to nightclubs, to concerts, to places where I once tried and failed to keep up.

It means accepting that I cannot *always* join them in those spaces, that no amount of effort will change the fundamental reality of my deafness. It is a kind of grief— one that I've been carrying for years.

But it also means gaining something precious: *authenticity* . I no longer have to strain, to guess, to pretend. I no longer have to endure the aching pressure of my hearing aids, the headaches from over-amplified noise, the constant stress of trying to parse meaning from chaos. Instead, I can embrace the way I naturally communicate —through movement, through expression, through presence and not pretence. The world may not be built for me, but I do not have to shape myself to fit within it. I can build my own spaces, my own connections, my own ways of being. Above all this is *not* resignation.

This is *also* not giving up. This is choosing to live honestly, as I am —a deaf creature in a world of humans.

Finding my creatures: Finding my Deaf Critter Culture

For deaf and disabled therians, community equals survival. Many of us have spent years trying to navigate a human world that does not accommodate us, struggling to find spaces where we can fully exist without compromise.

The isolation that comes from being both deaf in a hearing world and a therian in a human-centric society can be overwhelming. But through intentional community-building, we carve out spaces where our unique ways of experiencing the world are celebrated.

In both therian and Deaf cultures, *communication is more than words*. Many therians instinctively rely on body language, movement, and energy-based interactions—much like non-human animals do.

Deaf communities have long embraced visual-spatial communication, primarily through sign language, but also through gestures, expressions, and environmental awareness. These modes of connection feel deeply aligned with therian instincts, allowing for a richer, more authentic way of interacting that doesn't rely on speech. Paddy Ladd, wrote in "*Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood"*, argues that the dominance of spoken language has long been used as a tool to oppress Deaf people, forcing us to assimilate rather than embracing our natural ways of communicating.

In the same way, therians often feel pressured to conform to human modes of expression, suppressing their instincts and embodied ways of being. Creating our own spaces means rejecting this expectation and reclaiming the ways we interact with the world.

To thrive as deaf therians, we must actively reject *exhaustion* as a prerequisite for *belonging*.

Too often, social spaces demand that we conform—but we do not exist to fit into a world that was not built for us. Instead, we must build our own spaces, where our ways of being are honoured, where exhaustion is not a cost of connection. This means reimagining what

accessibility truly looks like—not as an afterthought or an accommodation, but as a foundation of our collective spaces.

It means recognising that spoken words are not the sole currency of communication and that silence, movement, and nonverbal expression hold just as much meaning as spoken language.

For some of us, it may mean prioritising sign language, writing, or body language over speech. For others, it might mean embracing touch, vibration, or even instinctive vocalisations that resonate more with our animal selves than with human expectations. We must refuse to let exhaustion be the toll we pay for participation.

Building these spaces is not just about reducing strain—it is about reclaiming joy. When we are not constantly navigating barriers, we can engage more fully, play more freely, and connect in ways that feel natural to us. A warren does not demand that a rabbit move like a wolf, nor does a flock require its members to hunt like a pride. Our kinship structures must reflect the diverse ways we experience the world, allowing each of us to contribute without erasing the differences that make us who we are.

We must reject the notion that the burden of adaptation always falls on us. Got that? *It is not our responsibility to bend ourselves to fit into an inaccessible world*; the world must shift to make space for us.

And if it does not, then we will carve out our own spaces—ones where we do not have to fight to be understood, where our instincts are not dismissed as eccentricities, and where we can finally belong without exhaustion.

A Final Apology… And Moving Forward

I realise there's something I still need to say: I'm sorry. To my friends, my lovers, my pack-mates and partners, *I am sorry for pretending to hear normally*. Not just to you, but to myself. For years, I tried to be something I wasn't. I convinced myself that if I just tried hard enough, if I just wore the hearing aids a little longer, if I just pushed through the sensory overwhelm—then *maybe* I could keep up. Maybe I could belong in the world as it is, rather than asking the world to meet me halfway.

But I can't. I never could. And in trying, I have exhausted myself to the point of breaking. I know this means that some spaces will often be closed to me. I will never fully experience the chaotic joy of a packed nightclub, the shouted conversations in a bar, the ease of slipping into a hearing world without extreme effort.
Sometimes I will have the energy to at least participate, but this is a loss, and I grieve it. But that is also okay.

Because fighting to be included in a world that cannot accommodate me is not the same as actually belonging.

Instead, I choose truth. I choose to stop apologising for what I am.

I choose to build a life where I don't have to fight to be simply understood. That means creating spaces where silence is not isolation, where movement is language, where I do not have to exhaust myself just to stay present. It means being honest about what I need, about what I can and cannot do—and trusting that the people who love me will make space for me *as I am*.

I don't know exactly what comes next, but I know this: I will not spend another moment pretending to hear. I am a deaf creature in a world that was not built for me, but I am not alone. I never have been. I have you creatures who will love me as I am, openly and no longer pretending to be able to hear, but to be as I am—deaf, scatty and a little bit off-scripted— just as a Shimi was always meant to be.

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https://archive.org/details/@claire_foxx/uploads

About Shimi:
Shimi is deaf, she is a transsexual anarchist, a Therian, a writer, artist, musician & punk poet living in Seattle with a cat and a whole bunch of other animal-creachurs.

A 'ragingly unrepentant trans girl', a relationship anarchist, therian-for-therian and sapphic furfag. "I'm a skinny little rat-faced girl, an apex scav, with a bitey li'l critter living inside my head."

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